

Traditional Arts - New challenges

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Culture shapes the way we see the world. It therefore has the capacity to bring about the change of attitudes needed to ensure peace and sustainable development which, we know, form the only possible way forward for life on planet Earth. Today, that goal is still a long way off. India boasts of its traditional art forms and culture. It has been attracting special global respect for its unique knowledge since the long past, be it in Philosophy, Arts or Literature. Despite this fact, we can not deny our society's gradual detachment from the traditional base. The changes have become susceptibly fast during the last few decades. This is especially prominent in the urban lifestyle that is followed by the rural life. This is happening because of the rat race towards modernism. The paradigm equating development to modernization and modernization to Westernization has long been, and still is, the conventional wisdom. So, the result is quite predominant. The society is under the grip of Western culture spell.

The culture is a way of life and a way of living together. This includes the values that people hold, tolerance for others (race and gender), outward as opposed to inward orientations and inclinations, and so on. These gets expressed in different forms, be it Music, Literature or Visual art and other art forms. Because of wide globalization the cultural pluralism is increasingly becoming an all-pervasive feature of societies.

With the change of the mass taste due to cultural invasion through the media-s the traditional art forms are facing direct threat on its survival with its age old glory. Globalization and internationalization is good as it binds the people of the planet Earth under a universal platform. The globalization creates plurality in culture and this ultimately gives birth to new forms of culture in combination with the traditional. As already indicated, the general mass equates modernity with Western culture despite the fact that there are several recognized alternative strategies of development. We can see the obvious outcome in almost all fields of art expressions.

Look at the common music. The non-Indian, that is predominantly Western, influences are ruling the music. The modern Indian music is flooded with adopted alien elements that have taken the status of natural musical happening. This kind of music no more attracts any special attention as these influences have been accepted by the mass. Even the classical music makers are not spared from these influences. This is clear from the different experimental music albums produced during recent years. The actual classical music performances also experience considerable changes in styles. The musicians can debate on this. The general music values also changed to a good degree. Today's musician's abilities are no more scaled in terms of the knowledge of rare *bandishes* or rare *raga*-s or command over *tala*-s. They are scaled in terms of 20th/21st century gimmicks that are saturated with fastness and crispness in execution and various sound effect productions. The music pieces have become smaller in duration, playing with minute note details has become a rare musical happening. In the speed-age the audiences' listening abilities are numb to the minute music details. In earlier days the music was also remembered because a *raga* was played for 5 hours. The ability of the musician to elongate the music-story was considered to be his forte. Now

the 90-minute pieces have also considered heavy. This same thing can be seen reflected in games as One-day cricket or fast- move-Chess.

The music scenario has passed from live non-microphone age to microphone age to digital multimedia. Earlier patronage was from the Kings, *Nawab-s* and *Sultan-s*, the next phase through the music connoisseurs of the *ex-Zamindar-s*, now the government and commercial giants. The government is patronizing to some extent because the music is theoretically considered as National Treasure. The commercial blocks are sponsoring because there are still some concert goers in some selected metropolises those are tilted to a small number of musicians (not music!), so this is a kind of advertisement and also possibly a tax-saving device. Of late music getting sold on the Internet. Take a look at <www.mp3.com> site. You can access to millions of music pieces and also buy CD-s (they call DAM CD). This is the maximum visited site today and even more popular than the sites that cater to people's gene productive instincts.

There is a pressure on the Government aided institutions that it must earn enough to sustain. Earlier State support has been practically withdrawn from many institutions. Many music institutions those have been catering to traditional music are at a doorstep of closure. The theory of 'Demand and supply' has been forced in even in the study and learning of traditional arts! This may seem unethical but already a living challenge on the institutions. Some of these institutions have been serving for the last four decades or even more on the promotion of our great traditional music, they have been preparing listeners under whose patronage the music could see the prospects of long life and existence.

Who deny the high qualities of our classical music when the whole world admires its unique height? So, how the major withdrawals of Government support on such institutions can be justified on the perspectives of ethical values. Is it not one of the fundamental responsibilities of the State to offer full support in the sustenance and fostering of our great traditions? How anybody can deny this?

The other perspective is education vs. compatibility with the society. Looking at the huge population of our country, one way of utilizing this great potential is using this huge human resource to advantage. The only way to use this resource is to provide appropriate education to people that suits the society's requirements. So, it is the responsibility of the educational institutions those are imparting serious education (not hobby courses) that they examine the curricula for its compatibility with the demands of the society. The students should receive the know-how those they may apply after passing out the courses and earn their bread themselves. Most of the courses have to be vocational or professional courses aiming at producing new entrepreneurs those are on demand in the present industry or are capable of starting some self-industry. The concept of industry has changed in the recent times. The big industry no more means huge employees and huge area in all cases. The small industry can begin in a room and take route through e-business. It may also be a music industry in the form of a home studio!!

All human beings have a need and a capacity to create. From weaving to website, they seek outlets for artistic self-expression and for contributing to the greater community. It is recognized that:

"the encouragement of creativity from an early age is one of the best guarantees of growth in a healthy environment of self-esteem and mutual respect, critical ingredients for building a culture of peace. ----

It (UNESCO) encourages both individual creativity, with its roots in traditional or popular culture, and industrial creativity, which draws its force from social and economic institutions that stimulate market activity and innovation." {UNESCO Sector for Culture <http://www.unesco.org/culture/creativity/html_eng/index_en.htm> Last update 13/04/00]

It is hard to understand why despite several efforts (Pt. Ravi Shankar when he was a Member of Parliament also pleaded for it) the introduction of music education from the primary level could not take place. It is unfortunate that despite UNESCO and local pleadings the statesmen and leaders are yet to appropriately recognize the utility of this education for formation of a healthier society resulting to the solution of problems like decrease of ethical values, indifference to the sufferings of the co-people, etc. The members of the society should be educated and must develop enough sensitivity to react constructively to different societal and institutional problems. Sincere feelings for the sufferers and development of a general attitude to make direct contribution for uplift of the downtrodden must be widely spread amongst the members of society. One of the main points for this is possibly the development of finer sensitivities amongst the youth. One of the possible solutions lies in mass music education that ultimately result to the increase of finer sensitivities in the people.

Under the changed social environment and with changed tastes how traditional art can foster and practiced with appropriate seriousness is the question of the day. It is time that we look back and intently feel the changes, and study and conceive the changed situation. It is important that we understand and go for detailed analysis. This will be helpful in deciding the right course of future action so that the Traditional Arts can play its complete and all-round role with full virility and finesse. The prospective areas of in-depth thoughts may be:

1. Traditional arts and culture invasion.
2. Traditional arts: a crucial key to solve the societal crisis.
3. Creative perspectives and current social changes.
4. Impact of socioeconomic conditions on traditional art forms.
5. Current art and traditional values in retrospect.
6. Role of traditional art in the contemporary society.
7. How the traditional art forms can retain their glory amongst the mass.
8. Government and traditional arts.
9. Music and Arts education to meet the challenges.

Let us think together.